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DISCUSSION.

CONSISTENCY AND ULTIMATE DUALISM.

IN the January number of the REVIEW there appeared an article by Professor Sheldon entitled, "The Consistency of Idealism with Realism." This article is noteworthy not merely because of the conclusions reached, but also on account of the persistent logic with which they are worked out. Mr. Sheldon shows the true philosopher's willingness to follow the argument patiently where it leads; but he also hopes thereby to compose an ancient quarrel of the schools by assigning to each party a secure territory which has equal rank and dignity with that of its former rival.

Mr. Sheldon begins by defining Idealism as the view that rests on the axiom of system, and Realism as that which assumes the ultimate reality of the limited or finite part. He then asks: "May it not be the case that there is really no contradiction between ultimate independence and ultimate system or dependence" (p. 53)? The object of the article is "to show that the idealist, while retaining his doctrine of the ultimate reality of the whole system, may without contradiction admit that of the parts as abstract, isolated, independent of the rest; and the realist, *mutatis mutandis*, may do likewise. The result will be an ultimate dualism, which should no more contradict monism than system contradicts independence." Hitherto the axiom of system and that of independence have been regarded as opposed to each other. Idealists, assuming the first, have argued to the self-contradictory character of the abstract part, while attempts to meet these arguments and solve the contradiction have proceeded by the denial of this axiom. What Mr. Sheldon proposes is to free the conception of the abstract and independent from contradiction, while at the same time maintaining the validity of the notion of system. Both axioms are final and ultimate: neither is to be subordinated to the other. This is possible because the seeming incompatibility and contradiction of these axioms rests upon a misinterpretation of logical laws.

I do not propose to follow in detail Professor Sheldon's argument, which I assume is already known to readers of the REVIEW. But I shall confine myself to an examination of the presuppositions on which he bases his conclusions regarding the relation of realism and idealism.

In general, I agree with him in maintaining that there is no real contradiction between these standpoints when properly defined. To show their consistency, however, it is necessary to exhibit their inner relation and dependence. To leave them standing side by side, each possessing final truth, as "an ultimate dualism," is not to effect any genuine reconciliation. In purpose and spirit, Professor Sheldon's article may indeed be regarded as an important contribution towards a better understanding. Nevertheless, in spite of the non-partisan spirit of his discussion and the pains he has taken to state the arguments on both sides fairly, he has reached a conclusion in which it appears plainly impossible to rest.

This conclusion follows directly from the assumption, maintained from the outset, of the self-sufficiency of each of the axioms already referred to, which he names 'independence' and 'system.' The purpose of his argument is to show that these axioms do not *exclude* each other. What I wish to suggest is that the argument should have been carried further to prove that these axioms are positively consistent, in the sense of *including* and *implying* each other. In that case, of course, neither taken in isolation could have been regarded as absolutely and finally true. But, as I hope to be able to show, the merely negative reconciliation which is proposed is not only unsatisfactory in itself but rests on presuppositions whose inadequacy has been already revealed in the history of thought.

In order to prove that the idea of an independent or completed part is neither contradictory in itself nor excluded by the conception of 'system,' Mr. Sheldon considers first the demands of pure logic as expressed in the laws of identity and contradiction, "as valid quite independently of the nature of fact, and giving us absolute criteria of reality without regard to the given nature of things" (p. 54). This contrast between thought-in-itself and the nature of things is the real basis, as will appear later, of the 'ultimate dualism' of his result.

Mr. Sheldon's actual discussion of the laws of thought fortunately does not abstract altogether from actual experience. By means of concrete illustrations and examples he proceeds to show that thinking in its real use constantly involves and exhibits sameness and differences, and that novelties and diversities are not in themselves incompatible or contradictory. This result it would have been impossible to extract from the abstract form of the so-called "pure logical laws." Or rather, if one undertakes to discuss the meaning of these laws 'in the realm of pure thought,' one will deduce from them just what one has already put into them. Thus, for example, Mr. Bradley in the

first part of *Appearance and Reality* demands, in the name of consistency, absolute identity without a shade of difference. Mr. Sheldon, professing likewise to consider only the criteria furnished by pure thought, reaches the conclusion that identity does not exclude novelty and diversity. While this conclusion does not seem to go far enough in recognizing the necessary implications of identity and difference, it is nevertheless an important advance on Mr. Bradley's Eleatic form of rationalism. The point that I am here urging, however, is that Mr. Sheldon reaches his conclusions—and this I take to be a virtue rather than a defect of his method—because he has not altogether failed to look to experience and to interpret thought in its concrete working with experience. The procedure of his argument has been determined, to some extent at least, by inductive results and has not been determined wholly by supposititious *a priori* principles.

Nevertheless, the separation is assumed throughout the article, and the more concrete view which is at times adopted, perhaps because it has been adopted inadvertently—does not in the end suffice to overcome the consequences of that assumption. Just because of the separation of the realm of logic from that of fact, the discussion shows a constant tendency to regard identity and difference as external to each other. It recognizes, indeed, at least in words, the necessity of identity in difference, but these are not taken as genuinely interpenetrating each other, but rather as mechanically joined as identity *and* difference. It is this interpretation which appears to make possible the author's main thesis of the ultimate validity of both the system and the isolated part. Mr. Sheldon is rightly concerned to maintain the reality of what he calls 'the completed part.' He sees also that the part is demanded by the system, that identity is abstract and unmeaning without difference. What he does not appear to recognize is the complementary truth that an identity or system enters into and is a real constituent factor in what we call the part or the individual thing. It is on this point that his view differs from Hegel's conception of the concrete universal. The difference between the two views is not, as Professor Sheldon supposes, that Hegel denies the reality of the parts as over against the system, while he himself is concerned to retain them. That may serve to distinguish his view from that of Mr. Bradley. But Hegel insists no less on the reality of the parts than on that of the system. He maintains, however, that the relation is *completely reciprocal*, that each factor enters as an actual constitutive element into the other. Professor Sheldon, on the other hand, if I interpret him rightly, does not get

beyond the mechanical conception of parts *and* system. The parts are indeed essential; for without them there could be no system; but the latter is in no way essential to the reality of the parts, which have an absolute and complete independence as over against it.

There are, indeed, certain statements in the article that seem to point to a different view,¹ but the course of the argument seems to presuppose the interpretation I have given. This may be seen from the latter part of the article where he turns from the consideration of the laws of thought to show that, from the standpoint of actual concrete experience also, there is no contradiction in the notion of a complete and independent finite thing. The answer to the arguments brought against this view, he finds in the conception of the "completed infinite," a conception which has more than once been appealed to by realists in support of their position. I do not wish here to examine this conception in detail; but one may fairly ask, I think, for an example of a completed infinite outside the sphere of abstract mathematics. Moreover, if such 'completeness' can be exhibited, does it not involve and imply a 'system'? It is true that the relations are now internal, organic to the very nature of the thing itself. But this is quite different from an independence which excludes system, or which can be ultimate without any relation to it. The completed infinite idea, if it can be carried over at all from mathematics, seems to make directly against the doctrine of external relations, which it is supposed to support. But as this is somewhat apart from the point I am discussing, I turn to certain other statements in these paragraphs.

"All explanation," Mr. Sheldon tells us, "is identification" (p. 61). "A fact is grounded on another in so far as it is reduced to identity with that other" (p. 66). This has been assumed as an axiom by Bergson and James. But instead of concluding, as these writers do, that logic is therefore inadequate to experience, Mr. Sheldon goes on to show, in accordance with his discussion of the laws of thought, that in the process of discovering grounds novelties and diversities

¹ Thus on page 63: "Thought expressly demands both sameness and difference; to the most formal possible thought each is meaningless without the other." And on page 61: "On my hypothesis the diverse element is reduced, for no whit of sameness is excluded from it, yet at the same it retains its diversity." But how, if this is true, is it possible to abstract from the aspect of identity and to consider the thing merely in its aspect of diverseness? For certain practical purposes this may indeed be allowable; but if the identity enters into it as a real element, how can the element of diversity *taken by itself* be final and ultimate? Or to put the same question in other words, if the diversity is 'partially reduced,' why is it not necessary to consider that feature in order to reach a truth that is absolutely final?

may make their appearance *without interfering with* the grounding through identity. It seems evident, however, that he does not hold that the diversities are essential to the process of grounding or in any way contribute to it. That is effected through bare identity. "All explanation is identification." The differences have no part in the process, they are simply there as logical epiphenomena which are untouched by the bath of identity. It is true, as I have already noted, that there are sentences that seem to bear a different interpretation. We are told that, "Everything does, indeed, in accord with the axiom of system, imply an endless wealth of other things, *even in its own internal make up.*"¹ The passage however continues: "But it does not contradict that implication to fix attention on the other side, the completeness by itself of the thing; for completeness does not *exclude* dependence, though it is *other than* dependence. What properties are revealed in the study of the thing regarded as complete by itself, will therefore be absolutely and finally valid of that thing—because its completeness is an absolute and final attribute of it. Hence when a philosopher investigates the meaning of any important object, such as a category, he should investigate it in two ways: (1) as part of a total system, bound up with other categories, deduced from and implying others, and (2) as restricted to its own field, independent of other categories but revealed by the nature of the objects alone to which it applies. The former is the idealistic, the latter the realistic method; and both should be equally final" (p. 67).

One might naturally suppose that the conclusion to be drawn is that neither of the above mentioned ways of studying an object is in itself final, and that such a view cannot be reached by employing *seriatim* and independently the two methods of investigation. It would seem to follow that the two methods must be combined, one being used to throw light upon the other. But for Mr. Sheldon the dual method is a necessity of the unmediated dualism in the nature of each thing. The nature of the system is contained in "the internal make up" of everything, but, alongside of this, there exists also its completeness, as "an absolute and final attribute of it." The two attributes do not interpenetrate,—they are merely in juxtaposition. 'Completeness is *other than* dependence.' Hence the knowledge of one attribute does not involve in any way the knowledge of the other. We may add together in an external way the two pieces of information, but they cannot be brought into any logical relation. Just so, as we have seen, the two real elements of the thing stand apart and so do

¹ I have added the italics.

not exclude each other. It is doubtless true that anything may indeed without contradiction stand in juxtaposition with anything else. It is only when the elements are combined into some kind of a system that contradictions and incompatibilities come into existence. All things, as Leibniz says, are possible, but not all are compossible. Where there is no unity there can be no exclusion, and conversely without exclusion no unity. Accordingly it appears that Mr. Sheldon has obtained freedom from contradiction for the disparate aspects of things by sacrificing the element of unity. The thing is constituted wholly by a sum of parts or attributes which do not interpenetrate and therefore give rise to no real unity. Without the idea of unity, however, how can we speak of things, or attributes or aspects at all? The conception of system or unity which is recognized as obtaining between things is equally necessary *within* things to express the reciprocal dependence of their constituent parts. If we are obliged to recognize that concrete things are connected and interdependent, then *a fortiori* it seems impossible to think of the aspects or attributes of things as related only in a mechanical and external way. Mr. Sheldon's puzzle is to understand how the finite part and the system can both be real. And he has solved it by dividing things into two elements or attributes which do not *exclude* each other, but which have no positive relation or dependence. In virtue of one of these elements, each thing is in itself complete, in virtue of the other, it is dependent and finds its completion in a system. This, of course, is simply an ingenious way of retaining a mechanical mode of explanation, and is exactly analogous in principle to the procedure of physical science when, in order to explain change, it resolves a concrete thing into unchanging elements. The unsatisfactory character of the solution seems therefore to depend upon his conception of identity *and* difference as external to each other, or at least as not interpenetrating and organic.

Moreover, as I stated in the earlier part of this paper, this interpretation of identity in difference is the consequence of an unfortunate separation of thought and the laws of thought from concretely experienced facts. For, when this separation is made, the principle of identity seems to express the nature of the procedure of thought, while the differences fall outside it, belonging to the concrete empirical order of fact which is ascertainable by observation only. Mr. Sheldon speaks, indeed, of thought 'demanding differences' and as 'pointing beyond mere thought.' Nevertheless, this demanding and pointing does not actually unite it with its 'other.' "For the difference, the uniqueness, the novelty, of each object of thought, while

implied by the very demands of thinking, whose nature as it is in itself thought cannot ascertain. As a matter of fact, only observation can do this. But even if observation does not, there is no contradiction present. Though thought points beyond itself, we are not driven out to observation by the goad of a contradiction. Thought is consistent enough internally even while it implies that there is more beyond. The only contradiction which could enter here would be that thought does not depend on observation for its filling-out. It can *ignore* observation without inconsistency, but it cannot *deny the truth* of observation. Viewed as independent, it has no fault in itself; viewed as dependent on experience, it becomes enriched. The latter gives a *larger*, but no *truer* result" (p. 63). Thus we have the two orders of truth standing apart, each without any necessary relation to the other. Thought "depends on observation for its filling-out," but in its own field is perfectly consistent and independent. Consistency is a criterion which in no way involves completeness of empirical fact. The two kinds of truth can be taken successively or added together, but they do not enter into each other. But this is surely only another form of the Rationalist doctrine of the separation between 'truths of reason,' based on identity, and 'matters of fact' guaranteed to us by experience. True, Mr. Sheldon insists that the two realms are not contradictory, and that both points of view should be recognized. The same, however, is also true of Leibniz and his successors: Wolff, for example, works out a parallel series of rational and empirical sciences.

My main purpose in this discussion has been to bring to light the presuppositions of Mr. Sheldon's argument. If I have interpreted him correctly, the whole movement of the history of philosophy from Kant on furnishes the best commentary of the position he advances. For the most valuable result of that movement has been the formulation of the conception of the concrete universal and its application to the various problems of experience. The opponents of idealism at the present day have not generally recognized the full significance and bearing of this category, nor realized how completely it has rendered obsolete many of the problems of the older systems. If Mr. Sheldon is to defend his position, he must discuss and come to terms with the claims of this historical point of view.

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